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U.S. Department of Agriculture

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION
WASHINGTON

April 15, 1932.

MEMORANDUM FOR BUREAU EDITORS, LIBRARIANS, AND OTHERS INTERESTED IN THE DEPARTMENT SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS

Some objection has been expressed at times by Department authors to the designation "Circular" as a medium for carrying the more or less semi-technical published material of the Department of a type somewhere between the popular Farmers' Bulletins and Leaflets and the more technical, fundamental, and research type of material published in Technical Bulletins. Some of the bureau editors have also at times expressed the view that the descriptions, characterizations, and limitations of the Department series of publications, as given in the Administrative Regulations, are not sufficiently explicit and definite for authors and bureau editors to determine with reasonable precision in which series certain material should be published.

It therefore seems appropriate to consider these matters, to determine what change, if any, should be made in the designation of our Circular series, and to revise the Administrative Regulations in the direction of more definite demarcation between the series. You will remember that the name "Circular" superseded that of "Department Circular". Is it really necessary to have two series of publications for the technical material between that of Farmers' Bulletin type and that of the Journal of Agricultural Research? May we not properly lump all such material into the Technical Bulletin series? That would save a lot of time in argumentation about the series in which technical material should be published. It would not, of course, distinguish between the fundamental, technical, research work of the Department intended only for specialists in the subject and that of more popular nature giving the results of variety and fertilizer tests, crop yields, milk and reproduction records of dairy herds, and the simpler forms of routine experimentation, involving no new principles, difficult technic, or unusual accomplishment in research. To publish all such material as Technical Bulletins would accordingly do away with the present classification of technical material into the two lines of publications. Is this desirable? What do the research men of your bureau who prepare either or both types of this material think about it? Would the plan tend to lower the standards and diminish the prestige of our Technical Bulletins and of the research work published by the Department?

About three years ago a committee of editors from the State colleges and experiment stations studied the Department plan of publication and recommended that we limit our published matter to fewer series. Elimination of our Circular series would be in harmony with that suggestion.

On the other hand, many of those concerned with our publications feel strongly that when once a series is established, it should be perpetuated in order to avoid confusion to librarians, specialists, and the general public who use our material. Otherwise they think it makes the Department appear unstable and vacillating in its policies. If it is finally decided to retain the series intermediate between Technical Bulletins and Farmers' Bulletins, should we retain it under its present name? If not, what designation would be more appropriate?

I should therefore appreciate it if you would give very careful thought to these problems, consult with your bureau chief, with other administrative officials, and with the authors in your bureau, and let me have by May 16 the recommendations that your bureau would officially wish to make with reference to the Circular series and a more explicit characterization of all the series of Department publications. I shall then tabulate the replies, call a conference of the bureau editors and librarians further to discuss the matter, and then make definite recommendations for the approval of the Director of Information.

Sincerely yours,

M. C. Merrill,
Chief of Publications.